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# The 3rd Bienal da Bahia: Transgressive Archives

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# The 3rd Bienal da Bahia: Transgressive Archives

Adiva Lawrence

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- 1 An initiative of the state of Bahia, the *Bienal da Bahia* was reinstituted in 2014, 46 years after its last edition in 1968. Entitled *É Tudo Nordeste?* (Is Everything Northeast?), it explored the political and cultural memories characterizing the Northeast region of Brazil, bringing back the spirit of transgression demonstrated by its first editions in the 1960s and promoting a distinctive local point of view. It was held between May 29 and September 7, 2014 in Salvador and 24 other Bahian municipalities. The Museum of Modern Art of Bahia (MAM-BA), run by Marcelo Rezende, an art critic and curator from São Paulo, was entrusted with the programming of the *Bienal*. The curatorial board included two principal curators, Ayrson Heráclito (artist and professor) and Ana Pato (researcher and art critic), as well as two assistant curators: Alejandra Muñoz (architect and researcher) and Fernando Oliva (art critic and researcher).
- 2 Two art biennials were organised in Salvador in 1966 and 1968, for the purpose of promoting local artistic production and establishing the Northeast region as an important and dynamic cultural hub inside Brazil. As Fernando Oliva points out, Bahia had only recently become an official part of the Northeastern region of Brazil in 1959, and the 1960s were consequently very important in helping the region define and position itself (OLIVA 2014: 48). The first biennial, which was led by two local artists, Juarez Paraiso and Riolan Coutinho, gathered approximately 800 works by 270 artists from various regions of the country, and included famous figures of the Brazilian avant-garde such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, as well as established local artists like Mestre Didi and Mario Cravo, two sculptors from Salvador. It was held at a convent in Salvador, the Convento do Carmo, which had been restored especially for the event (OLIVA, 2014: 48). Hosted by another one of the city's convents, the *Convento da Lapa*, the second edition displayed a more ambitious number of works. However, as curator Ayrson Heráclito explained, a greater proportion of local artists were chosen than in the first edition. The selection criteria was intentionally inclusive rather than

exclusive, allowing far more local artists to participate, thus better reflecting the reality of the Northeastern artistic landscape (Personal communication; 2015)<sup>1</sup>.

- 3 The biennials cycle was interrupted after the second edition. According to curator Alejandra Muñoz's research, this occurred for structural and political reasons. (Muñoz, *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*; 2014: 16). Internal conflicts arose following the first edition and hampered the organisation of the second, exacerbated by violent censorship from the stiffening military regime (already in place since 1964), which led to its shutdown only two days after opening. It finally reopened one month later, minus many allegedly controversial works. Furthermore, the main organisers of the biennial were imprisoned. The extreme violence in which these acts of censorship occurred remains almost unparalleled in the cultural history of Brazil, as Muñoz writes (Muñoz; *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*; 2014: 16), which attests to the extent to which the event was perceived as transgressive, threatening the established order within the regime. Brazil's military regime, like in many of the other dictatorships that emerged in South America throughout the 1970s and 1980s, was characterized by the systematic repression of all forms of internal subversion, considered harmful to national security (GREEN, 2014). At the time, the regime singled out São Paulo to showcase Brazilian modernity and economic power to the world and help position Brazil as an important international artistic centre by tolerating the organization of the São Paulo biennial (WHITE-TORO, *Manual do Professor*; 2014: 12). In contrast, the Bahian biennials may have represented the potential for an undesirable counter-discourse to the national art narrative, which up to that point was completely focused on the Southern region and its key figures – Oswald de Andrade and Tarsila do Amaral, to name the most famous (Heráclito; Personal communication: 2015)<sup>2</sup>. The divide between the North and South of Brazil may be traced back to the history of colonisation and slavery, and while a detailed analysis of this history is beyond the scope of this essay, I would suggest that it accounts in large part for the peripheral role of the Northeast region both economically and culturally. The tactical undermining of the importance of the Bahian biennials thus appears to be symptomatic of tangible tensions that were already extant within Brazil (OLIVA, 2014: 49).
- 4 As debates and criticisms surrounding the multiplication of biennials throughout the world, often referred to as “world biennialization,” grow more numerous and ferocious, largely pointing to their commercial, spectacle-oriented nature and to a supposed generalised vacuity of their artistic content, efforts to adopt alternative forms for such events have emerged. The adopted strategies often highlight the necessity of reconciling art display with social action and making biennials relevant to the communities that inhabit the spaces where they take place. An alternative model which is often cited is that of the Havana biennials of 1984, labelled the “biennial of the third world,” because of the emphasis it put on showing art from outside established international art networks, which at the time were largely dominated by Western artists. The first editions of this biennial represent significant instances of large-scale art events where dominant models were questioned, and their limitations made apparent. From a certain perspective, the Bahia biennials were the first to instigate this kind of attitude, given their emphasis on promoting local artistic production (Muñoz, *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*; 2014: 16). The Bahia biennials's intention was thus based on a double transgression: on the one hand, it sought to oppose the assumed backwardness of the Northeast and domination of southern regions in Brazil; on the

other hand, it provided a biennial model that aimed to subvert international codes with respect to what should or should not be displayed.

- 5 While the 2014 Bahia biennial included international artists this time, it claimed a direct lineage with former editions, made clear by adopting the *3rd Bienal de Bahia* name. In this paper, I attempt to analyse the legitimacy of this claim, by unpacking the ways in which the 3rd edition's curators created an event that sought to embody the transgressive legacy of the 1960s. A process I would call "archival digging" was used to reassess the importance of the art produced at the time, as well as to critically readdress the questions that they raised. But this biennial also created new archives, purportedly for the benefit of future generations, to preserve contemporary history from oblivion. The archive is often an essential element of contemporary exhibitions, and I will look at some of the implications of such use. I will examine the archive as a theoretical concept and tool in order to show how the *Bienal da Bahia* chose to adhere or not to some of its attributes, thereby creating new forms of archives and traces of the present. These considerations are framed by a larger interrogation on the possibility of transgression in the current context of "world biennialization," and if the archive, both resulting from and producing power, can legitimately be used as an instrument of resistance.

## Working with the Archive

- 6 As expressed by Rezende, there was a strong need to rethink the past of Bahia, in the light of the history and legacy of the dictatorship, which is still a sensitive issue in Brazil (Rezende; Personal communication; 2014)<sup>3</sup>. A "duty to memory" was invoked by the curatorial board as being the "raison d'être" of the project (CURATORIAL TEAM; *Journal of 100 Days*), which was conceived as a platform to bring to light the existence of a biennial tradition that opposed the preconceptions associated with the region. Through the voluntaristic form of the biennial it appeared possible to bring this spirit back into the present. As suggested in the introduction, it seems that, for political reasons, the Northeast and its artistic production were to remain relegated to a provincial position. This does not suggest that the Northeast has been devoid of a cultural scene since the 1960's. For instance, regional Salons have been organized consistently since 1949, and the biennials de São Felix and do Recôncavo, have contributed to the dynamism and visibility of art production in the region (Muñoz, *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*: 2014: 18). However, this Bahia biennial by symbolically wishing to bring back the spirit of the 1960's, proposed an interesting take on the struggle for affirmation and valorisation of a Northeastern art circuit (Muñoz, *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*: 2014: 18). The curatorial team of the third edition considered urgent the need for Brazil to include the trajectory of Bahia in its official art history narrative, which up to this day remains focused on Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and to trigger a critical investigation of the region, its history, and the present state of its cultural scene. This necessary reclaiming thus entailed digging into the archives of the region, to find out more about the former biennials to begin with. But the question of how to work with archives that do not exist was a problem the curators had to solve (Ana Pato, *Journal of 100 Days*, 2014). Ayrson Heráclito described the process as resembling archaeological research, since very few documents remained, and reports that they had to work mainly with oral memories (Heráclito, Personal

Communication: 2015). Fernando Oliva evokes the process of information recovery from artists, art professionals and people connected to the events that participated in the first editions, carried through with about twenty-two hours of interviews, and some testimonies recorded on film (Juarez Paraíso, Francisco and Alba Liberato, Lia Robatto, Pasqualino Magnavita, Juca Ferreira, Leonardo Alencar, Luís Henrique Dias Tavares, Gleí Melo, J. Cunha and Nair de Carvalho, among others). Not all remembered the events clearly, but this shortcoming was part of the process (OLIVA; 2014: 53). The results were displayed in the opening work “*A Reencenação*”, which means “the re-enactment”, which I will describe in more length in another part of this essay.

- 7 There was a desire to make those archives durable and reusable, to prevent them from being forgotten again, and those newly constituted memories were thus donated to the public archives of Bahia, so as to be available to researchers in the future.
- 8 Following the same logic of recovering hidden memories of the events, the Museum of Modern Art displayed images of works that were destroyed or damaged when the biennial was shut down in 1968, in a show called *Utopia-Distopia*. The desire to bridge a gap between today and the 1960's was evident in the number of important spaces that were dedicated to showing the works of artists working then, so as to create a reappraisal of the ideas they were promoting. In the Museum of Modern Art, part of the ground floor in the main building was dedicated to Juarez Paraíso, one of the founders of the first biennials, and major Brazilian xylogravure artist, whilst on the 1st floor works by Rogério Duarte, an emblematic figure of the 1960-70's movement *Tropicália*, as well as images and films of key figures of the movement such as Glauber Rocha and Gilberto Gil were exhibited. All of these artists came from Bahia, and the display of their work brought to light the important Bahian contribution to *Tropicália*, a cultural movement that had nationwide importance. As demonstrated in the exhibitions showing the work of “*Tropicália*” artists, the movement and ideas it disseminated form an important conceptual framework for the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia*, and provide a good example of conceptual “archival digging.” The movement developed towards the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, providing an image of Brazilian art that challenged the more traditional model supported by the military regime. It promoted an appreciation for Brazilian folk culture as a way to oppose the conservatism of the dictatorship. For example, in a Salvador museum, the Museu Carlos Costa Pinto, there was an exhibition devoted to two Bahian artists, Ednizio and Dicinho, whose roles were central in establishing the importance of the Bahian group within the *Tropicália* movement. The exhibits at the Palacete das Artes cultural centre also demonstrated how vibrant an art scene the Northeast possessed, and reminded us of how fundamental folk traditions can be in the search for authenticity, by showing the works of artists affiliated with Pernambuco's PEBA movement. The idea of tropicality promoted by these artists entailed an acceptance and reclaiming of Northeastern tropical identity and way of life, highlighting its roots in folk traditions as a basis for a its distinct style. Displaying these works again in a contemporary context like that of the biennial is a way of bringing the poetics associated with these aesthetics into the present. Both of these exhibitions were curated by Ayrson Heráclito, a Bahian-born artist working with performance and photography, and who has tackled the issue of the cultural legacy of slavery in Bahia extensively. Exhibiting the works of important Bahian artists also contributes to forging another version of Brazilian art history, as Heraclito explains. In addition to his artistic practice, Heráclito also conducted

research on the Bahian art scene that emerged in the 1960s, laying the foundations for a distinct artistic tradition, different from the modernist projects that evolved in São Paulo and Rio, and very much in tune with the latest issues emerging in the rest of the world (Heráclito cites the experimental films of Glauber Rocha and the opening of the first Brazilian contemporary dance school in Bahia (Heráclito, Personal communication; 2015). In order to raise questions about the failure of this period's works and ideas to gain more traction in Brazil, Heráclito set out to give the forgotten artists of the Northeast a voice. The biennial enabled him to demonstrate how many artists working in the 1960s and 1970s deconstructed the images they were associated with, such as that of a Northeast frozen in tradition and incapable of evolving (Heráclito, Personal communication; 2015)<sup>4</sup>.

- 9 In keeping with the idea of reengaging with the past, the MAM-BA decided to revive the ideas of its first director, architect Lina Bo Bardi, who had renovated the building and written about how museums should first and foremost be spaces devoted to education, discussion and sharing knowledge (BO BARDI; 2005: 212). That was actually a starting point, says Rezende (REZENDE, Personal communication; 2014) []. A magazine, *Contorno*, was also launched to document the evolution of the biennial and to provide commentary on key themes addressed by the biennial. The educational department played a major role in the event. A team of museum educators from the region was trained in the *Museu Escola Lina Bo Bardi* program offered by the MAM-BA. They were to be present in all the exhibition spaces and act as intermediaries between the public and the works. In addition, a list of works shown in each exhibit and its associated *Journal of Just One Day* were also available. Anyone could sign up for the museum educator course, as long as they were at least 18 years old. As Felix White-Toro, an educational department coordinator explained to me, there was very little precedent for this kind of educational program in Bahia, despite the fact that it was one of Lina Bo Bardi's founding principles for the Museum of Modern Art (WHITE-TORO, Personal communication, 2014). Her plan to democratize museum knowledge and authority was halted by the advent of the military dictatorship and its conservative approach to art in the region (Muñoz, *Bienal da Bahia, Manual do Professor*: 2014: 16).
- 10 Since the biennial was intended as a space for debate and discussion, it was preceded by open lectures organised by the MAM-BA about its history and content, and the kind of inquiries it wished to instigate. For example, a programme was set up to host discussions about some of the key texts that have marked Brazilian art history. One such text was the "*Manifesto Antropófago*" (1928), by Oswald de Andrade, which defines the concept of anthropophagy as the process by which, in Brazil, foreign cultural influences are swallowed up and digested, to be made locally relevant. The author's intention was to have this kind of cultural cannibalism accepted as distinctively Brazilian and become the basis for Brazilian modernity.
- 11 Hélio Oiticica, an important figure of the *Tropicália* movement who participated in the first Bahia biennial, and who coined the term "*Tropicália*" in 1967, provides an interpretation of the imperatives of the period, which still resonates with current concerns about the state of culture in so-called "peripheries" in a text called "General Scheme for New Objectivity". This essay marks an important moment in the articulation of "Brazilianness" in art, formulating an update of the notion of anthropophagy, which the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia* seemed to have transposed to the context of the Northeast. Furthermore, the biennial had been designed as a platform enabling

Bahians to actively reflect on their position in the world. Its title, *Is Everything Northeast?*, questions the relationship between geographical and cultural identity in a way that resonates with Oiticica's concerns about the state of Brazilian culture. The concept of "New Objectivity" does not imply a refutation of reason, but instead refers to a possible alternative, another locus of authority. In the same way Oiticica proposed to create a Brazilian objectivity, that is, to take Brazil and its particular aesthetic as a new standpoint from which to perceive the world, the *Bienal de Bahia* suggests that we grasp it from the point of view of the Northeast.

## Creating the Archives of the Present

- 12 As Marcelo Rezende explained in an interview, the biennial considered the Northeast as a universal condition rather than a particular one (REZENDE, Personal communication: 2014)<sup>6</sup>. According to this position, global culture was to be integrated into Bahian reality, thereby taking on new meanings. And it inevitably presupposed a renegotiation of Bahia's position within this global culture. The curatorial proposal clarifies this point:

With *Is everything Northeast?* we aim to craft an archaeology of beliefs, ideas and fantasies, utopias and rituals, orders and commands, sensibilities, politics, perception and reactions that ended up defining, within Brazilian culture, what the Northeast is, or, in many instances, should be. (...) This curatorial process aligns itself with the main aim behind the two other editions of the Biennale of Bahia: instead of being historically and artistically read by the "Other", it is the local experience, thought universally, that reads this 'Other'. (Rezende; Curatorial project; 2014: 7)

- 13 Marcelo Rezende also insisted on the importance of engaging in this discussion at this particular time, because of the new position Brazil had secured on the global stage, and the renewed dynamism demonstrated by Bahia in the past few years (REZENDE, Personal communication: 2014). The biennial proposes to redefine what the Northeast is and means, within a setting that questions the influence of dominant cultures. "The Imaginary Museum of the Northeast", the main exhibition ensemble, brought together exhibits divided into departments and subdivided into sections, with specific themes that could be directly or indirectly related to Northeastern culture, and displayed in various cultural and arts centres, mostly in Salvador. Among the exhibits that depicted Northeastern realities, there was for instance the Juraci Dórea installation in the chapel of the Museum of Modern Art called *Sertão/Museus/Arqueologia*, where a particular approach to Sertão aesthetics was on display. The Sertão is a sub-region of the Brazilian Northeast, characterised by an arid climate and a strong history of sugar cane agriculture. Juraci Dórea was born in Feira de Santana, in the interior of Bahia, and is an important figure of the Bahian art scene of the past decades. At the Palacete das Artes, an entire building was dedicated to an exploration of the concept of "*Naturalismo Integral*," developed in 1970s by Pierre Restany, Sepp Baendereck and Frans Krajcberg in Amazônia and explained in "The Whole Naturalism Manifesto" (1978). The manifesto argues for a new mode of perception and understanding of the world that would be shaped by "nature's logic." In this exhibition space, various types of objects were collected, from old photographs of the Amazons and travel diaries to wooden sculptures. The exhibition's key work was the *Naturalismo Integral* film that Restany made. The showcasing of these works raises questions about their possible meaning in



a contemporary context of increased exploitation of Amazonian resources. The biennial's program also included a visit to the Ilê Axé Opó Afonjá terreiro, an important place of worship for Candomblé practitioners. Candomblé is a religious tradition that originated amongst African slaves in Bahia and has become an emblematic element of Bahian life.

- 14 Brazilians were not the only represented artists. There were also artists from other countries whose recent or older works led to multifaceted interactions. For example, at the Bahia Nautical Museum, in a small exhibit on revolutionary struggle, a film by French filmmaker Agnès Varda on the Black Panthers appeared alongside wood engravings by German-born Hansen Bahia, creating a dialogue about race. The racial issue remains complex and controversial in Brazilian culture, but the struggles it gave rise to resonate in many other parts of the world. There were also exhibition spaces dedicated to more general subjects, such as the history of conceptual art (at the Goethe Institute) and gender-related issues (at the MAM-BA), generating exchanges between local and international viewpoints. In general, the works were strategically selected for their relationships with local realities instead of the usual international biennial logic that focuses on programming international works. This translated into a desire to show works that were either created in the Northeast, or were to be redefined in the context of the Northeast. There were several locally based projects, such as those carried out by Camila Sposati and her *Teatro Anatômico* (Anatomical Theatre) on the island of Itaparica near Salvador, or Arthur Scovino in a church in Salvador, the Igreja dos Aflitos, which led to unprecedented encounters and highlighted local realities, forcing visitors to reconsider local history. As Marcelo Rezende explained, a biennial based on the São Paulo model would not be possible. It would have been considered a “luxury” that Bahia could not afford (REZENDE, Personal communication; 2014)<sup>7</sup>. This explains why one of the main organizing principles behind the biennial was to work with and for Bahia, and accentuate its own distinct reality. This was illustrated, for example, by choosing to create and exhibit copies of a piece by Lygia Clark, because it would have been too expensive to import the original. Lygia Clark was an eminent figure of the first edition, and the inclusion of her work was a necessary component of the biennial's idea of re-enactment. However, it would have been impossible to show the original, because of the prohibitive insurance costs and also museological conditions her works now require. The curatorship thus asked Ayrson Heráclito to make a cardboard replica, which was then replaced by a plastic miniature purchased at the Clark Art Center store. The Clark Art Center is a contemporary art centre dedicated to making Lygia Clark's archives accessible. This provocative attitude subverted one of the basic rules of the art exhibition's organisation, which stipulates that only originals can be acquired and displayed. The educational department could therefore allow visitors to manipulate the object, and actively engage with the significance of Lygia Clark's presence in the first edition, as well as the difficulties of exhibiting such important artworks in the Northeast today (OLIVA; 2014: 50)
- 15 The idea behind the biennial was thus less about putting together a shiny and polished event than creating one that would be faithful to the reality of Northeastern conditions, while simultaneously pointing out those conditions. And the biennial collected many aspects of what Bahia is and means in the form of archival materials, demonstrating a clear desire to document these elements for the purpose of creating new archives. This was immediately visible in the documentation available on the



different sites of the biennial and the literature produced for the event. The *Journals of Just One day* distributed in each exhibition space, along with the maps and lists of displayed works, aesthetically imitated the archival document, and functioned as conceptual frameworks for each of the shows. They were sheets that looked like newsprint and included texts and images related to the exhibitions. The texts could be curator or artist statements, or theoretical writings about the ideas addressed in the exhibitions. The paper distributed at the entrance of the Solar Ferrão Gallery, for example, dedicated part to the question of post-racialism, consisted of a text by Ayrson Heráclito, the section's curator, and contributions by Roberto Conduru and Achille Mbembe, two key thinkers on postcolonial African identity. The final e-book, called *Journal of 100 Days*, released a few months after the end of the biennial, contained similar information, mixing pictures and text, and recreated the event's timeline. The aforementioned documents provide a theoretical framework for the exhibitions and also ground them within a tradition, the texts also functioning as archives, in the sense that they justify and legitimize the statements made throughout the exhibitions. While the biennial was an attempt to see the world from the perspective of the Bahia region, it seems like the inherent properties of the archive were exploited, conversely, to ensure the event was memorable and decipherable to the outside, and would remain so for future generations. The region backs up its claim that its point of view is universal by using investigative techniques that have been recognized as objective (research, science and archives). This last point, and the idea of "archaeology" formulated in Rezende's curatorial proposal, also present in the title of Juraci Dórea's exhibition, can also find echoes in Michel Foucault's approach to the archive, expressed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

The archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. But the archive is also that which determines that all these things do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass (...): they are grouped together in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities. (FOUCAULT, 2006)

- 16 The production of archives is thus organizational and leads to the emergence of epistemological categories.

## The Authority of the Archive

- 17 There is an authority attached to the archive that generates discourse and produces meaning with regards to reality, whether past, present and even possibly future. By definition, an archive is a « collection of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or group of people », according to Oxford Dictionaries 2016. Thus, by documenting a reality, one is also producing it, albeit a narrow version of it, restricted to what will be displayed to the outside world, thus limiting what can be said about it and imposing a hierarchy on it. The production of archives can help a place like Bahia establish a position from which it can speak to the world. It is also assumed that a biennial is a particular form of expression that is intelligible within the world of contemporary ideas and knowledge, as well as art market circuits, which allows for the formulation of certain representations to be officially recognized. The biennial's heavy use of archival apparatus may be seen as a tool to add weight to the authority of its claims, setting the stage for the future

validation of Bahia's artistic production based on the visibility the biennial enabled it to benefit from. Moreover, by emphasising the existence of previous biennials, and by making it "archivally" clear, the organisers of this biennial prevent it from being relegated to the status of "yet-another-biennial-in-a-region-in-need-of-recognition," and secures its right to speak. Therefore, despite the fact that the 3rd *Bienal de Bahia* sought to subvert the biennialization system, by adopting a different model and moving away from some of its classic strategies, it can be said that this biennial still operates within an international art framework and the legitimacy it requires to speak about itself is also grounded in the worldwide recognition (or disavowal) of the biennial format. This conclusion would cancel out any claim to its being transgressive, since its transgressive qualities would be thus seen as staged and thus fake.

- 18 Another argument that may be used to undermine the biennial's attempt to be faithful to the Northeast's current reality, and to have this reality be recognized, is that living culture, or living memory, does not need to appear in exhibitions or be "enshrined" in museums in the form of objects to legitimize its existence. This argument rests on the notion that museums are repositories, and that the objects they contain were chosen by a given generation to represent their idea of the past. French historian Pierre Nora provides an elaboration of this view in his article "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire" (1989). What he calls "*lieux de mémoire*" are all the objects and monuments that are invested with historical and symbolic meaning. Nora defines "*lieux de mémoire*" as "remains, ultimate embodiments of memorial consciousness", which "make their appearance by virtue of the de-ritualization of our world – producing, manifesting, establishing, constructing, decreeing and maintaining by artifice and by will a society deeply absorbed in its own transformation and renewal" (1989: 12), and which "take the forms of Museums, archives, cemeteries etc." (NORA, 1989: 12). He adds that "Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives" (12). Could the decision to mount a biennial to grant legitimacy to the culture of the Northeast be a sign of weakness, betraying the fear that without recognition these traditions face disappearance? As mentioned in the introduction, this biennial intended to oppose the discourses traditionally associated with the Northeast, by creating an event that would reassess the artistic history of the region and demonstrate its cultural vibrancy. And indeed, it can come off as an artificial historical construct, a way to force its way into world history in a position that differs from the one traditionally attributed to the region. The danger with historicizing culture is that living memory could be eradicated, "With the appearance of the trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory but of history" (1989: 8).
- 19 Also, as Ruth Rosengarten writes in her e-book essay "Between Memory and Document" (2013), the principle of indexicality on which the archive rests, "the trace of the unique, the differentiating imprint – not only governs the formation of an archive it also determines that which is archivable" (2013), and in accordance with Derrida's "Archive Fever" (1996), she draws a parallel between the urgency of archive production and Freud's death drive, defined as a "motion towards destruction as an awareness of the limits that time puts on us", leading to the "archival desire as striving to halt the ineluctability of time's passage, of destruction and death through erasure of difference between index as a sign and its referent" (2013). Because, according to Derrida's reading of Freud, the "death drive" manifested by all civilizations, a tendency towards

the repetition of trauma, leads to the erasure of internal memory, and the production of external stabilized archives comes to replace actual memory. She adds “The pitfalls faced by such endeavours are clear. Like the photograph, the archive itself may become a fetish when it ceases to be a repository of traces : in the inferential reconstruct of historical processes, becoming instead a surrogate for the missing thing itself” (2013). The danger with archives is thus twofold. The desire to openly build new archives in a thorough and careful way may be helpful in the sense that it allows for their meaning to be produced internally, provide insights as to how the documents should be interpreted and potentially prevents certain things from being forgotten. At the same time, building a catalogue that necessarily focuses on certain aspects at the expense of others, lending them more visibility and power, amounts to a display of arbitrary authority. Consequently, subjecting objects to such a process of exclusion leads to an incomplete representation of reality. Some of these objects might become fetishized, that is, become endowed with a sacred status, and through disproportionate respect, lose everyday relatability and their bond with social life.

## “Repetition, not recollection”

- 20 The biennial curators seemed to be well aware of the controversial attributes of the archive, and tried to find ways to subvert its inflexibility. Suely Rolnik posits that archive politics have the “ability to enable the archived practices to activate sensible experiences in the present, necessarily different from those that were originally lived, but with an equivalent critical-poetic density” (2012 : 4). In this article, which deals specifically with Latin American examples, she argues that the fact that the repressive dictatorial regimes many Latin American countries had to face in the 1960s and 1970s led to the formation of specific modes of resistance and artistic expression, whose legacy is still relevant, and may still be re-actualised to fight contemporary battles (2012). I would like to focus here on this idea of translating past poetics into the present in order to revive a similar spirit of resistance, and the extent to which this was accomplished by the 3rd *Bienal de Bahia*. The idea of re-contextualising them in a contemporary setting is key. As expressed in Rolnik’s plea, these old fights have to be applied to contemporary reality, which comes with its fair share of challenges. In that sense, Oliva insists on it being a process of repetition, which implies active involvement, and not a recollection (OLIVA, 2014 : 51). The biennial’s opening exhibition, *A Reencenação*, which means the restaging/re-enactment, curated by Fernando Oliva was on display in the *Mosteiro de São Bento*, a monastery in Salvador, recasting some of the ideas that the previous editions of the biennial had originally put forth (Conselho Estadual de Cultura da Bahia ; 2014). Oliva insists that the point was not to create a show that presented objects as mere memorabilia, as an index of the period, which would objectify the events that took place in 1966 and 1968, reducing them to a set of relics. Instead, the show included new works by artists who participated in the former biennials, such as Almandrade, a visual poetry artists and major figure of the Bahian art scene since the 1960s, and the new generation of Bahian artists, such as Ana Verana, Arthur Scovino, Zé da Rocha, creating an active dialogue between past and present (2014 : 53).
- 21 Thus to re-enact the traumas of the period, through archival re-reading, was intended as more than a way to strong-arm their inclusion in official art history. By re-

contextualizing the works of the period or publishing testimonies in a dialogue with contemporary productions, the re-enactment would perhaps allow the public to come to terms with these traumas. Thus, making the archives accessible to the public would hopefully encourage people to engage with them and deal with what they represent, granting visibility to some of the historical contradictions they reveal. One project, curated by Ana Pato under the *Archive and Fiction Working Group* and exhibited in the State Archives building, commissioned contemporary artists such as Eustaquio Neves, Gaio Matos and Paulo Bruscky, as well as researchers to work with materials from the Public Archives of the State of Bahia, the collection of the Anthropological and Ethnographic Museum Estácio de Lima, the Public Library of Barris and the Juracy Magalhaes Junior Library in Itaparica (CURATORIAL TEAM, *Journal of 100 days* ; 2014). Many judicial and legislative documents from the colonial period were re-appropriated and displayed, bringing to light some of the problems that forged Bahian society.

## Ephemeral Truths and State of Creativity

- 22 In the biennial, there is also a clear desire to prevent tendencies to create fixed discourses about the Northeast. As previously mentioned, exhibitions sets were organized under the umbrella of “The Imaginary Museum of the Northeast.” One of the strategies the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia* used to avoid mounting a set of exhibitions that would act as an authoritative catalogue or folkloric showcase of the Northeast was to insist that the main exhibition device was “imaginary,” fictional. The exhibition themes were chosen because they addressed issues afflicting the Northeast, but as with the biennial’s statements in general, they are open-ended and their authority is intentionally ephemeral. They did not even coexist as a coherent and graspable whole, because they were scattered in spaces across various locations. In designing the imaginary museum, the curatorial team had a specific reference in mind (Rezende, *Revista Contorno* ; 2013 : 57), the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers and his *Musée d’Art Moderne : Département des Aigles* (1968-1971), which was also an imaginary museum that did not belong to a particular space. “It had neither permanent collection nor permanent location, and manifested itself in ‘sections’ appearing at various locations between 1968 and 1971. These sections typically consisted of reproductions of works of art, fine-art crates, wall inscriptions, and film elements” (MoMA ; Artists pages, Broodthaers : 1999). The idea of an imaginary museum also stemmed from an examination of the role of museums as “heterotopias,” in Michel Foucault’s words, that is, as repositories for utopias, where an illusion of order and power over reality is created (rezende, *Revista contorno* ; 2013 : 57) (FOUCAULT ; “Of Other Spaces” 1986). Exhibition spaces were thus understood as temporary readings of certain realities, dependent on the objects that were shown and on contingent elements related to the manner in which they were displayed. The insistence on being allowed to incorporate fictitious archives in exhibitions has been widely discussed in recent times. Critic Hal Foster formulated some of the leading thoughts on the subject. In his article “An Archival Impulse,” he writes that archival reconstruction takes as a given that its materials are “as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private” while it “assumes its anomic fragmentation as a condition not only to represent but to work through, and proposes new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity of doing so” (FOSTER ; 2004 : 21). Instead of using the archive as a tool to make a statement authoritative, what is valued here is

its capacity to generate relationships. It attests to a desire to find connections between things that may not be apparent and not even necessarily *real*, but which would amount to one of many poetic ways in which it is possible to see the world, but which should nonetheless be remembered, and therefore documented.

- 23 And, according to several critics, the particular shape this type of practice has taken in the last decades is often taken to be symptomatic of our times, which are characterised by an incessant flow of information and images, and inevitably linked to the forces of globalisation, as already expressed in 2002 by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his much commented essay “Postproduction : Culture as Screenplay : How Art Reprograms the World” (2002). These factors account for the current tendency many artists have of using the archive to create narratives that are increasingly personal or removed from any notion of objectivity or truth, focusing instead on the present, the moment, on a given time and place, which is considered to be the only thing art can potentially have an impact on. By inscribing the work of art within a network of signs and meanings, instead of considering it as an autonomous or original form, by finding ways to fit it into countless production lines (BOURRIAUD ; 2002 : 18), through possible *scenarios*, the work gains clarity but not necessarily authority. Bourriaud adds that, more specifically, art tends to try to give shape to invisible processes, to shed light on the relationships between things, functions and processes, but no longer as objects, “which would be to fall into the trap of reification” (2002 : 32) and fetishization mentioned earlier in this essay, but as mediums of experience. Bourriaud adds that the work of art may thus consist of a formal arrangement that generate relationships between people, or be born of a social process and sees this tendency as a symptom of the “culture of activity” (2002 : 44) that we live in :

It is a matter of seizing all the codes of the culture, all the forms of everyday life, the works of the global patrimony, and making them function. To learn how to use the forms, as the artists in question invite us all to do, is above all to know how to make them one's own, to inhabit them (...) This recycling of sounds images, and forms implies incessant navigation within the meanderings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice (BOURRIAUD ; 2002 : 19).

- 24 This approach to artistic creation implies a belief in the power of artistic productions to embody or to express certain aspects of collective culture and cultural creativity, and by extension, in the power of biennials to unleash this potential in their deployment of artworks, in order to generate new social and cultural situations. In other words, in the case of the Bahia biennial, this would mean creating spaces for people to embrace creativity as a subversive tool through the exploration of past poetics of resistance in a way that is not dogmatic but open-ended, as an acknowledgment of the instability of contemporary reality.
- 25 The idea of inhabitable situations was fundamental to the 3rd *Bienal de Bahia* project. It required that the visitors be physically involved in the biennial, and this could be achieved by physically investing the spaces already inhabited by the population, leading to unavoidable interactions. The shows were not concentrated in one or a few big exhibition halls, but in various locations around the city, leading to a (re)discovery of Salvador as a spatial reality. This strategy consisted in invading space with art. The MAM-BA was the designated nucleus of the biennial, but its program consisted of the “Imaginary Museum of the Northeast” exhibits, film screenings, conferences, the artistic occupation of a church by artist Arthur Scovino, as well as artistic projects in

Terreiros (Candomblé sites of worship) - by Nuno Ramos, all obeying the basic principle of a “living reality.” Visitors were invited to take an active part in their experience of the biennial, not just by visiting the exhibitions but also by participating in workshops, events such as concerts, shows, film screenings, in a context free of any hierarchy. Also, the duration of the biennial was divided in 3 periods (“*temporadas*”), each comprising different sets of events that were meant to embody the notion of active process rather than fixed discourse. All of this contributed to mapping out an archaeology of Bahia, but not a fixed one. Rather, these temporal divisions were meant to enhance potential encounters with Bahia as a place, each being potential scenarios. This emphasis on experiencing the biennial as a living process was an idea manifest in how the biennial unfolded, and expressed by artist Juarez Paraiso as “The Northeast is a human experience” (in Rezende ; Curatorial Project ; 2014 : 7). Rezende explained that, for example, the artistic occupation of a church by Arthur Scovino led to unusual encounters between the church community, the artist and contemporary art forms, which, in turn shaped the direction of the work (REZENDE, Personal communication ; 2014)<sup>8</sup>. The occupation of the Teatro Castro Alves by artist Luis Bérrios-Negron also illustrates this idea of “potentiating social doings” (JONES ; Catálogo Tear do Terreiro ; 2014 : 34). The artist developed *The Weaver* with help from a Terreiro leader as a way to question notions such as time, the relationship between men and nature, sacred space, etc. The concept consists of an urban garden on the rooftop of the Castro Alves theatre, where medicinal herbs were to be planted to heal society while also providing “a political re-imagination of public space in Salvador” (Berrios-Negron ; Catálogo Tear to Terreiro ; 2014 : 43). Berrios-Negron explains, “This potential, mental landscape and medicinal garden looks to instigate public reform for the benefit of the city”. What is suggested here is the capacity of art to act upon political and social reality, through the creation of community projects that make sense for the communities that get involved in them, to make participants more aware of these problems and willing to help solve them. This brings us back to this idea of fostering creative activity through the dissemination of art inside Bahian archaeological sites.

- 26 Both Arthur Scovino’s and Luis Berrios-Negron’s projects were curated by Alejandra Muñoz. Both entailed a fusion of art and spirituality, one in a church, the other through a collaboration with a religious leader. This blurs the limits between the realms of the sacred and the profane, in which contemporary art usually belongs. The biennial exhibits seems to imply that art possesses a certain potency for social healing. Through the re-enactment of memory in exhibitions, the creation of situations where visitors, and Bahian visitors in particular, are made to face the realities of the world they live in or take part in artistic activities that invade public space, contemporary art could lead to social transformation. Thus, the biennial also provided an opportunity for people to meet in public spaces and create meaning through their participation. The fact that this biennial exhibited works associated with contemporary art practices, yet took place in locations with no museum affiliations where contemporary art was not traditionally shown led to the participation of people that would not normally take part in artistic ventures. By involving the public and creating a narrative that could make sense to them, the biennial was also trying to break down the rigidity of Bahia’s social organisation, where museum attendance and other art-related activities are not traditionally accessible to all strata of society (REZENDE ; Personal communication, 2014). This explains the importance allotted to the educational department, and the central role it played in the biennial experience.



- 27 The biennial, following Bourriaud's ideas, attempted to reprogram social forms and the exhibition as a production site (2002 : 74). Designed as an active social institution that is not restricted to the elite, the biennial sought to position the inhabitants of Bahia as conscious actors in a culture in the making. The biennial itself, then, acts as a stage where established cultural codes are transgressed through creativity, leading to various possible scenarios in which to better one's life.

## Conclusion

- 28 In this essay I have tried to examine some of the forms and implications of the extensive use of archives found in the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia*, and how this documenting process allowed for certain forms of transgression to occur in the contemporary context of Bahia. In some respects, when producing archives, it is very difficult to sidestep the adoption of a position of authority, even when it is precisely what they are meant to subvert, and the desire to stage transgression in such a way may appear paradoxical. This is also because, however fictional and unauthoritative the archival endeavours of the biennial were intended to be, they were nevertheless designed in accordance with a perceived reality in which certain elements were favoured over others. It remains to be seen whether such attempts are worthwhile, but the arguments for doing may sometimes appear stronger than the problems that arise from it, because at least, it allows for conversations to emerge. Suely Rolnik writes that "Artistic, critical, curatorial, museological and archiving activities must be thought through the forces that determine them at each moment" (2012 : 18), and this was certainly a precept that the curatorial team complied with. The 3rd *Bienal da Bahia* also raised questions about the ability of art and art events in general to really have an impact on community realities, as to the curatorial board of this biennial, it was worth harnessing art's potency to produce a kind of "historical healing" through active remembrance of the past, and confrontation with the reality of the present. Gerardo Mosquera, one of the founders of the Havana biennial wrote that art is probably a "precious means of dealing with cultural disjunctions and finding orientations" (2008 : 91), and if anything, the biennial did in fact seek to provide Bahia with the opportunity to determine what it could contribute to the global art world : by seeking to involve the people of Bahia in this process, through important mediational and educational projects, the biennial provided a different biennial model, one that was grounded in the reality of life in the Northeast. By investing spaces used everyday by local inhabitants, ordinary configurations were altered and recombined in new ephemeral realities (REZENDE, Journal of 100 Days, 2014) Some actions by the biennial's educational board also sought to get people actively involved through for instance the "Guerrilla Actions" undertaken by mediators to engage with people on the streets, in schools or restaurants, doing performances and getting them to react to the theme of the biennial (EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF THE 3RD BAHIA BIENNIAL, Journal of 100 days, 2014). It is possible to imagine that the traces of these unusual interactions will remain inscribed in the memory of the people who took part in it, and create new possibilities, or ways of seeing the world.
- 29 Moreover, people did get involved, in the biennial process. The recruitment of mediators allowed for people who were not familiar with discussions about art, history, society and education to get involved in a project about these questions for the first



time, and to develop, together with the board, a new kind of knowledge appropriation (REZENDE, Journal of 100 Days, 2014). Similarly, as Itala Herta, in her commentary on the work she conducted in the suburbs of Salvador for the biennial, describes how it allowed for local inhabitants to make a visible contribution to the cultural life of the region. The aim was to make this usually invisible space visible on the map, and link the local inhabitants with the art circuit, which was unprecedented. Herta writes that there was a lot of mobilization and that the community got actively involved. A new way of working may have been implemented in Bahia. For instance, some workshops developed for the biennial, such as the gardening workshop, attended by hundreds of students during the biennial, have been integrated the permanent program of the Museum of Modern Art (WHITE-TORO, Journal of 100 Days, 2014).

- 30 Thus the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia* experience, through efforts to reflect on its own past, and by highlighting certain aspects of life in the Northeast, sought to convey the image of a multifaceted Northeast, but most of all a Northeast that is alive and active in the writing of its own history. With regards to the negotiation of the Northeast's condition as universal, the biennial argued that the issues at play in the Northeast are universal and can legitimately resonate with other communities worldwide, despite the region's peripheral location. Working with an existing reality allowed for the emergence of an artistic practice anchored to a place, with its specific history and distinctive cultural identity, but which is dynamic and alive. This is what Mosquera meant when he quoted Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka and his critique of *Négritude*: "the tiger does not shout its tigritude: it pounces" (MOSQUERA, 2008: 91). What is on display is a cultural context embodied by the agents that have an active part in its construction rather than by fixed images. The result is unpredictable and the resulting archives should not become traces of the objects to be fetishized as remnants of the event that was the 3rd *Bienal da Bahia*, but traces of the thoughts that made it possible, in such a way that they may become rich source materials in the future (Curatorial Team; Journal of 100 Days). The 3rd *Bienal da Bahia* can be interpreted as representative of a current trend in contemporary archival practices: a utopian will to create a state of active creativity, away from a notion of history as solely authoritative. This interpretation by Hal Foster seems to apply here: "Perhaps the paranoid dimension of archival art is the other side of its utopian ambition – its desire to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relation, to transform the no-place of the archive into the no-place of the utopia" (FOSTER; 2004: 22). Thus by rectifying the tragedy of the censorship imposed on the past Bahia biennials, contemporary Bahia paves the way for the potential emergence of a brighter future, whose favourable outlook would be grounded in the space it created to enable individual creativity and criticality to emerge.
- 31 Suely Rolnik provides some insight on the matter: "What art can do is release the poetic virus out in the open air. And that is at least something, in the midst of struggle between the different forces that shape the provisional forms of reality in their never-ending process of construction" (2012: 18). That the 3rd Bahia biennial intended to disseminate a critically poetic vision of the world seems evident. However, whether audiences and Bahian elites recognized the importance of doing so is debatable as, despite being originally programmed for summer 2016, the 4th Bahia biennial was cancelled. As Ana Pato explained, the biennale received little critical attention within Brazil, and it is almost as if the past oblivion it sought to rectify had instead been

reenacted (PATO, Personal communication ; 2016)<sup>9</sup>. The website of the 2014 biennial is no longer online, although the ebooks associated to the exhibitions can still be downloaded on the platform Issuu. The digital traces of the event have thus been partially destroyed, bringing to light a structural unwillingness to give importance and credibility to the ideas the biennale sought to communicate in Bahia. The very fact that the event was once again denied visibility calls for more analysis of the current political context of Brazil in relation with the arts, and suggests that new strategies have to be found by those seeking to use art as a way to subvert traditional discourses. Only time will tell if the memories left by the biennial and the alternative model it sought to propose will prove useful to future generations in developing those strategies.

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## NOTES

1. Personal interview with Ayrson Heráclito, 16/06/2015, Lisbon.
2. Personal interview with Ayrson Heráclito, 16/06/2015, Lisbon.
3. Personal interview with Marcelo Rezende 12/09/2014, Salvador.
4. Personal interview with Ayrson Heráclito, 16/06/2015, Lisbon.
5. Personal interview with Marcelo Rezende 12/09/2014, Salvador.
6. Personal interview with Marcelo Rezende 12/09/2014, Salvador.
7. Personal interview with Marcelo Rezende 12/09/2014, Salvador.
8. Personal interview with Marcelo Rezende 12/09/2014, Salvador.
9. Personal interview with Ana Pato 12/09/2016, São Paulo

## ABSTRACTS

This article looks at the means deployed by the 3 Bienal da Bahia (2014) to re-enact the spirit of transgression that defined its previous editions, which took place in the 1960s at a time of political turmoil in Brazil, and questions the ability of artistic events to affect political resistance through the subversion of established codes. The Bienal was conceived as an archive-in-progress, and this article examines the potential of the archive as a transgressive tool. It provides an overview of the structure of the event, from its curatorial project to its actual execution, analysing it in the light of theoretical insights into contemporary exhibition making and archive politics.

Este artículo se interesa a los medios puesto en obra por la 3era Bienal de Bahia del 2014 para volver a poner en escena el espíritu de transgresión que caracterizaba sus ediciones precedentes, que tuvieron lugar en los años 1960, en un periodo especialmente delicado en la historia política brasileña; surge la pregunta de saber si los eventos artísticos pueden o no contribuir a la resistencia política, mediante la subversión de los códigos establecidos. Esta bienal está pensada como un archivo en construcción, y se trata de discutir sobre la capacidad del archivo para transgredir. Este artículo propone entregar una visión general de la estructura del evento, analizada a través de miradas teóricas sobre la organización de exposiciones contemporánea y de las políticas del archivo.

## INDEX

**Palabras claves:** archivo, transgresión, bienal, dictadura, creatividad, Bahia, Brazil

**Keywords:** archive, transgression, biennial, dictatorship, creativity, Bahia, Brazil

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